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A SEMANTIC NOTE

BY CARL D. BUCK

A Greek boy of the present day, who had lost a pet animal through neglect, might say: ἐξέχασα νὰ τὸ ταήσω, κ' ἐψόφησε, 'I forgot to feed it and it died.' The sentence would not be understood by one conversant only with ancient Greek, yet it contains no foreign element, but only words sprung from ancient Greek material. The source of ἐξέχασα, ταήσω, ἐψόφησε, was briefly indicated long since by the first critical student of the modern Greek vocabulary, Koraes. It is the purpose of this note to review their semantic history, noticing some parallels, and in connection therewith some of the many different sources of the notions 'forget' and 'die' or 'kill.'

ξεχάνω or ξεχνῶ, aor. ἐξέχασα, 'forget.' The ancient Greek expressions for 'forget,' λανθάνομαι, λήθομαι, ἐπιλήθομαι, etc., were first displaced by an allied secondary derivative λησμονῶ (cf. λῆσμαν, ἐπιλήσμων, 'forgetful'). This is the regular word for 'forget' in the present literary language, and is common enough in conversation. But the more colloquial word is the one cited above, a compound of χάνω 'lose.' From the ancient Greek χάος we have a late derivative χαώ 'lose' (L. & S.), aor. ἐχάωσα, which became ἐχάσα, ἔχασα, to which a new analogical present χάνω was formed. Hence ἐξ-ἔχασα and the analogical presents ξεχάνω or ξεχνῶ (for which cf. Hatzidakis, *Einleitung*, p. 410).

The special application of 'lose' to mental loss is precisely the same as in English *for-get* (likewise NHG. *vergessen*, Swed. *förgäta*, etc.), the opposite of *get*.

ChSl. *zabyti* 'forget' (so also Russ. *zabyt'*, Serbo-Croat. *zabiti*) is a compound of *za* 'behind' and *byti* 'be,' that is 'be (mentally) behindhand.'

Lat. *oblitiscor*, which has persisted in most of the Romance languages (through **oblitare*, whence Fr. *oublier*, Span., Port. *olvidar*, Roum. *uită*), probably rests on the notion of something 'smeared over, blurred' (cf. *linō*) or else on that of 'smoothed over, slurred' (cf. *lēvis*, *λεῦος* 'smooth').

Dan. *glemme* ‘forget’ belongs with ON. *glaumr*, OE. *glēam* ‘joy, revelry,’ ON. *gleyma* ‘be gay, neglect.’ To be gay was to be careless of anything serious, hence to ‘neglect’ or ‘forget.’

Various words rest on the consciousness that ‘forget’ is the opposite of ‘remember.’ The well-known illiterate ‘disremember’ represents a type which is entirely respectable in other languages. Cf. Skt. *smṛ-* ‘remember,’ *vi-smṛ-* ‘forget’ (*vi-* ‘dis-’); Goth. *ga-munan* ‘remember,’ *ufar-munnōn* ‘forget’ (cf. *ufar-swaran* ‘swear falsely,’ and the sense of Eng. *overlook* contrasted with *oversee*); Boh. *pomenouti* ‘remember,’ *za-pomenonti* ‘forget’; Welsh *cofio* ‘remember,’ *argofio* ‘remind,’ *eb-argofio* ‘forget’ (*eb* proclitic form of *heb* ‘without’); Irish *dearmadaim* ‘forget,’ OIr. *dermatim* from the noun *dermet*, a compound of *de* ‘down, away’+*ro*, and *met* related to Lat. *mēns* (Pedersen, *Verg. Gram. d. kelt. Sprachen*, II, 273); Ital. *di-menticare*.

A group of cognates all meaning ‘forget,’ but with no trace of any prior force, is: Skt. *mṛṣ-*, Mod. Pers. *farā-mūshīdan*, Arm. *moranam*, Lith. *mirszte*, Lett. *mirsti*.

ταήζω (*ταΐζω*) ‘feed.’ This is the same as *ταγίζω* ‘feed’ in Byzantine writers, e.g., Theoph. 490.18, *ἐπότισαν καὶ ἐτάγισαν τὰ ἄλογα αὐτῶν* ‘watered and fed their horses.’ The verb is a derivative of *ταγή* ‘food, ration,’ still in use and frequent in Byzantine writers, e.g., *Chron. Pasch.* 474.6, *πέπρακεν αὐτοὺς εἰς ταγὴν ἵππου ἔκαστον* ‘sold them [the captives] for a horse’s ration each’; *ibid.* 258.2 where *ταγὴ* is used of the daily maintenance granted Jehoiachin by the king of Babylon (=Jeremiah lii. 34, where the Septuagint has *σύνταξις*). Hesychius has *ταγή· βασιλικὴ δωρεά.* καὶ ή σύναξις τῶν πρὸς τὸ ζῆν ἀναγκαῖων, where *σύναξις* is certainly to be emended, after Koraes, to *σύνταξις*, as used in the passage of the Septuagint just referred to, and elsewhere, e.g., Diod. 1.75, *συντάξεις δὲ τῶν ἀναγκαῖων παρὰ τοῦ βασιλέως τοῦ μὲν δικαστais ἴκαναι πρὸς τὴν διατροφὴν ἔχορηγοῦντο*, or CIG. 4697. 15, *συντάξεις σιτικάς τε καὶ ἀργυρικάς*.

The history of *ταγὴ* may now be carried farther back, through the evidence of the papyri. It is used of a fixed quantity of provisions, e.g., *Ox. Pap.* viii. 1139. 3 (fourth century A.D.), *δότε Ἀρκαδίῳ ἐκσκέπτορι λαχάνων ταγὴν μίαν;* *Berl. griech. Urkunden* 1186. 16 (23/22 B.C.) *πράσου γλυκέως ταγάς λ'.*

In another passage *ταγή* occurs in the sense of ‘allotment, assignment,’ not referring to food. At least this interpretation seems to me clear, though the word is not so understood in the only translation of the passage which I know of. In a letter regarding a dispute with workmen in a quarry, *Flinders Petrie Pap.* ii. 4. 2 (third century B.C.), we read: *εγραψα σοι τηι ιζ την γενομενην μοι καταστασιν προς τους δεκαταρχους επι Διοτιμου περι του πληθους των σωματων και της ταγης των λιθων και ον τροπον ανωμολογηνται επι Διοτιμου τα τε ελλειποντα σωματα προσκαταστησειν και την ταγην των λιθων αναπληρωσειν πασαν εως της νουμηνιας.*

Mahaffy, *loc. cit.*, gives no translation and no comment on the use of *ταγή*. Bouché-Leclercq, *Rev. des étud. grec.*, XXI, 138, translates as follows: “Je t’ai signalé par lettre du 17 la contestation survenue entre moi et les dizaniers, contestation soumise à Diotomos, au sujet de l’effectif des hommes (*σωμάτων*) et de la répartition des pierres, et comment ils ont accepté devant Diotomos de fournir les hommes manquants et de parachever la taille des pierres au 1^{er} du mois.” He takes *ταγή τῶν λίθων* in the one case as the ‘redistribution,’ in the other as the ‘cutting’ of the stones. But surely the phrase has the same meaning in both cases. The dispute had been concerning the number of workmen and the allotment of work, and the agreement was to restore the full quota of workmen and complete the whole allotment or assignment of stones.

The *ταγή* we have been discussing is of course the same word as the *ταγή* which occurs a few times in classical authors (see L. & S.). Like the more common derivatives of *τάττω* it might carry any of the various meanings seen in the verb. In the Macedonian period it came into more frequent use in the sense of ‘assignment,’ especially the regular allotment of provisions or money (cf. *σύνταξις* in the passages quoted above, and the ‘royal dole’ of Hesychius’ first definition), and later persisted in the restricted sense of ‘allotment of food, ration’—just as English and French *ration* is a specialization of Lat. *ratio* ‘reckoning.’ Compare also NHG. *Speise* from Mid. Lat. *spesa*, Lat. *expensa* ‘distribution’; Eng. *provisions* in its usual, though not exclusive, application to food; Eng. *provender*, Fr. *pro-vende* from Lat. *praebenda*; Goth. *mats*, OE. *mete* ‘food’ (now *meat*), from the root of Goth. *mitan*, OE. *metan* ‘measure, allot’ (now

mete out). Similarly *μέτρημα*, from *μετρέω* ‘measure,’ was used specifically of the ‘ration,’ as in Polybius xi. 38. 3 and often in the papyri, e.g., *Brit. Mus. Pap.* I, 23, 26, *μετρήματα καὶ ὀψόνια* ‘rations and wages.’

The use of *ὀψώνιον* in this phrase, and regularly in the papyri, illustrates the opposite semantic change, the extension of the original notion of ‘food supplies’ (*ὄψον*¹) to include ‘supplies’ in general, until the application to food was so completely eliminated that the word was used specifically of ‘money payment’ in contrast to payment in food (*ὀψώνιον:σιτώνιον*; cf. *Brit. Mus. Pap.*, I, 55).

ψοφῶ ‘die.’ The regular Modern Greek word for ‘die’ is *ἀπέθανα* in the aorist, with a new analogical present *ἀποθαίνω* or *πεθαίνω* in place of the ancient *ἀποθνήσκω*. But *ψοφῶ*, in ancient Greek meaning ‘make an inarticulate noise,’ came to be used colloquially in the sense of ‘die,’ especially of animals or of men dying miserably, as from starvation. This use is attested for the twelfth century at least (*Prodromus*, I, 317, *ψόφουν ἐκ τὴν πεῖναν* ‘I was dying of hunger’), and is doubtless much earlier.

Koraes, *Atakta*, I, 264 ff., connected this use with the noise made by the body falling in death, comparing the Homeric use of *δουπέω* to denote the dull thud of the corpse, e.g., *δεδουπότος Οἰδιπόδαο* ‘when Oedipus had fallen.’ But it is rather the inarticulate gasp of death that furnishes the transition, for which the closest parallel is the slang *croak* in the sense of ‘die.’ Compare also the use in the sense of ‘die,’ and with the same application and tone as *ψοφῶ*, of Fr. *crever* and Ital. *crepare*, whence NHG. *krepieren*. While this use may of course be derived from the usual meaning of the French and Italian verbs, namely ‘burst,’ it more probably represents an old colloquial expression which, like *croak*, grew out of the notion of noise that was dominant in the Latin verb (*crepare* ‘crack, creak, rattle,’ etc.).

Another association underlying words pertaining to death is illustrated by Mod. Gk. *σκοτώνω* ‘kill,’ from ancient *σκοτώ* ‘darken,

¹ The semantic development of *ὄψον* itself, it will be recalled, was in the direction of further specialization. As fish came to be regarded as the ‘dainty’ *par excellence*, *ὄψον* was used in the sense of fish (*πολλῶν ὄντων ὄψον ἔκρεικηκεν δὲ ἵχθυς μόνος ή μάλιστά γε ὄψον καλεῖσθαι*, Plut. *Mor.* 667 F), and the colloquial form *ὄψάριον* displaced *ἵχθυς*. Hence Mod. Gk. *ψάρι* ‘fish.’

blind' ('kill' already in Byzantine writers), from *σκότος* 'darkness,' which in Homer is always the darkness of death. Compare Gk. θνήσκω, θάνατος, cognate with Skt. *dhvānta-* 'darkness'; and the Germanic group including Eng. *die*, *death*, NHG. *tot*, *Tod*, Goth. *dauþs* 'dead,' *dauþus* 'death,' which probably comes from the root **dheu-* through the medium of the notion of 'mist' or the like (cf. Skt. *dhūma-* 'smoke, vapor,' Latin *fūmus*, etc.).

In NHG. *sterben*, OE. *steorfan* 'die' (now *starve*) the underlying meaning was the 'stiffness' of death. Cf. NHG. *starr*, Gk. *στέρφνος* (Hesych.), *στερεός*, etc. A more offensive allusion to the appearance of the corpse is the vulgar 'turned up his toes.'

OE. *cylan* 'die,' whence also *cylan* 'kill' (now *quell*), belongs with OE. *cwealm* 'pain' and 'death' (now only the mild *qualm*), OHG. *quelan* 'suffer pain,' *quāla* 'pain' and sometimes 'death,' ON. *kvelja* 'cause to suffer,' Lith. *gēla* 'pain,' *gelti* 'ache,' OIr. *at-bail* 'dies.' In this group, in which the meaning fluctuates between 'pain' and death,' it is probable that the former meaning is the earlier, from which arose 'death' as the climax of 'pain.'¹

To 'die' may be, euphemistically expressed, to 'depart, pass away,' etc., as in Eng. *pass away* of reverent, or *pass out* of irreverent, speech. So Lat. *pereō*, Eng. *perish*. Ir. *bás* 'death' and related verbal forms are perhaps cognate with Skt. *gā-* 'go,' Gk. *ἔβην*, etc. (so Pedersen, *op. cit.*, II, 458, 461; otherwise Stokes, Fick II, 159). Avest. *iriθ-* 'die' (partic. *irista-* 'dead,' the blessed dead, the departed), used, in contrast to *miryeite* (below), only of good beings, is cognate with Goth. *-leiban*, OE. *līban* 'go.' Cf. also Lat. *intereō* 'go into the midst of' (get between, be cut off from view), whence 'perish, die'; likewise *intercidō* 'fall between, perish.' And of still other euphemistic expressions which may be current, like Gk. *ἀπαλλάσσεσθαι τοῦ βιοῦ*, there is no end.

The words for 'die' in the great majority of the IE. languages are from the common root *mer-*, which must have had this meaning

¹ Pedersen, *Verg. Gram. d. kelt. Sprachen*, II, 459 ff., assumes on the contrary that 'pain' is a weakening of 'death,' and derives the latter meaning from "es (das Leben) auswerfen," connecting the root with that of Gk. *βάλλω*, NHG. *quellen*, Skt. *galati*. If there is any such relationship, a more plausible semantic connection is suggested by the intransitive use and its evolution in Skt. *gal-* 'drip, drop, vanish, pass away.' See Wood, "IE. a* 99," *Mod. Lang. Notes*, XXXIV, 205.

already in the parent speech and is beyond the reach of any certain further semantic analysis.¹ Thus Skt. *mriyate*, Avest. *miryeite*, OPers. *amariyatā*, Mod. Pers. *murdan*, Arm. *meranim*, Lith. *mirti*, Lett. *mirt*, ChSl. *mrěti*, and so in all the Slavic languages (Russ. *y-meret*, etc.), Lat. *morior* and so in all the Romance languages (Fr. *mourir*, etc.).

In the Celtic, Greek, and Germanic branches other expressions for ‘die’ displaced this root, which survived only in derivatives, as OIr. *marb* ‘dead,’ Welsh *marw* ‘dead’ (whence also *marw* ‘die’), Gk. *βροτός* ‘mortal,’ Goth. *maurþr*, OHG. *mord*, OE. *morp*, *morpōr*, Eng. *murder*, etc. The Germanic forms, originally equivalent to Lat. *mors*, developed a pejorative sense and were used of unjustifiable, especially secret homicide, murder.

To ‘kill,’ as the causative pendant to ‘die,’ is often expressed by a derivative of the word for ‘die,’ ‘death,’ or ‘dead.’ Thus NHG. *töten*, Dutch *dooden*, Swed. *döda*, Goth. *af-daupjan*; OE. *cwellan* ‘kill,’ causative of *cwelan* ‘die’; Skt. *mārayati* ‘kills,’ causative of *mriyate* ‘dies’; Lith. *žudyti* ‘kill,’ causative of *žuti* ‘perish’ (though this is not the regular word for ‘die’); Lat. *interficiō* ‘slay, kill,’ which is virtually a causative of *intereō* ‘perish’; OIr. *marbaim* ‘kill,’ from *marb* ‘dead’; OPruss. *gallintwey* ‘kill,’ from *gallan* ‘death’; likewise Mod. Gk. *σκοτώνω*, Eng. *murder*, etc., previously mentioned.

But many of the words for ‘kill’ are unrelated to those for ‘die,’ and go back to the more general meaning ‘strike, smite’ or the like, as in Eng. *slay* in its present restricted meaning compared with that of OE. *slēan* or NHG. *schlagen*. Eng. *kill* goes back to a form which in its earliest occurrences means ‘strike, hit,’ as *ofte me hine culde* ‘often one struck him.’ Skt. *han-* means ‘strike,’ but is also the commonest word for ‘kill’ (likewise Avest. and OPers. *jan-*), while in the Greek cognates the meaning ‘strike’ prevails in *θείνω*, but ‘kill’ in *ἐπεφνε*, *πέφαται*, *φατός*, *φόνος*, etc.; cf. also, from the same root, OIr. *gonim* ‘wound, kill.’ Gk. *κτείνω*, *ἀποκτείνω*, the latter the regular prose word for ‘kill,’ are cognate with Skt. *kṣan-* ‘hurt, wound, destroy.’

¹ Though ultimate identity with a root meaning ‘pound, crush,’ etc., is commonly assumed and is probable.

Compare also Mod. Pers. *kushtan* ‘kill,’ cognate with Skt. *kus-* ‘tear, gnaw’; Lett. *no-kaut* ‘kill,’ from *kaut* ‘strike’; Dan. *draebe* ‘kill,’ cf. ON. *drepa*, OE. *drepan* ‘strike’ (sometimes also ‘kill’); Welsh *lladd* ‘kill’ (also ‘cut, strike’), Bret. *laza* ‘kill,’ cognate with OIr. *slaidim* ‘smite’; ChSl. *iz-bitu*, *u-bitu* ‘kill,’ from *biti* ‘strike,’ and similarly Russ. *ubyt'*, Serbo-Croat. *ubiti*, Boh.z *abiti*, Pol. *zabić*.

Similarly Lat. *caedō* ‘cut, strike,’ also ‘kill,’ and *occīdō* regularly ‘kill,’ whence Ital. *uccidere*, Roum. *ucide*, OFr. *ocire*. This general Romance word for ‘kill’ has been replaced by *matar* in Spanish and Portuguese, and by *tuər* in French. The derivation of the former from. Lat. *mactāre* ‘slaughter, kill’ (Diez) is at variance with the Spanish development of Lat. *ct*, and the word is now believed to be from the Persian (originally Arabic) *māt* ‘dead,’ which became familiar in Europe, with the introduction of chess, in the phrase *shāh māt* ‘the king is dead’ (whence Fr. *échec et mat*, Eng. *checkmate*). Fr. *tuər* was derived by Diez, starting from the phrase *tuər le feu*, from Lat. *tūtāre*, through such stages as ‘protect,’ ‘cover’ (the fire) and so ‘quench’ it, then generally ‘destroy,’ with which one might compare the occasional figurative use of Eng. *snuff out*. But there is no reason to believe that the use of *tuər* in *tuər le feu* is anything but a secondary one; cf. Lat. *aquaē flamas necant*, Pliny, Eng. *kill the engine*, *deaden the sound*, Ital. *smorzare* ‘quench, allay,’ etc. The use of *tuər* in the sense of ‘kill’ (a person) is quotable from the twelfth century at least, as my colleague Professor Jenkins informs me, referring to *Vie St. Georges*, 427, 1281. Connection with Lat. *tundo* ‘strike’ (so Littré, deriving *tuər* from **tudere* or *tuditāre*) is obviously the most plausible on semantic grounds, and I am convinced that *tuər* is actually derived from *tuditāre* despite the phonetic difficulty involved in Fr. *u*=Lat. *ü*.